

# Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers

---

Volume 20 | Issue 3

Article 9

---

7-1-2003

## Ganssle & Woodruff, eds., GOD AND TIME: ESSAYS ON THE DIVINE NATURE

J.R. Lucas

Follow this and additional works at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy>

---

### Recommended Citation

Lucas, J.R. (2003) "Ganssle & Woodruff, eds., GOD AND TIME: ESSAYS ON THE DIVINE NATURE," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*: Vol. 20 : Iss. 3 , Article 9.

Available at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy/vol20/iss3/9>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers by an authorized editor of ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange.

to meeting this challenge, Earman says, "Hume has generated the illusion of deep insight by sliding back and forth between various theses, no one of which avoids both the Scylla of banality and the Charybdis of implausibility or outright falsehood" (p. 48).

The second part of the book is an anthology including Hume's own essay along with other selections from primary texts pertaining to Hume's argument. These selections are drawn from the work of John Locke, Benedict de Spinoza, Samuel Clark, Thomas Sherlock, Peter Annet, Richard Price, George Campbell, Pierre Laplace, Charles Babbage, and one anonymous selection (perhaps by George Hooper). Of special interest are the very hard to find essays of Thomas Sherlock, "The Tryal of the Witnesses of the Resurrection of Jesus" (1729), and Peter Annet, "The Resurrection of Jesus Considered: In Answer to the Tryal of the Witnesses" (1744). These selections were so interesting that it is disappointing that the entire essays could not be included. Richard Price's reply to Hume is so substantial that one wonders how most philosophers ever got the general impression that Hume dealt a devastating blow to miracle reports. It seems that Price's work even caused Hume to second-guess himself (pp. viii, 24, and 45). Anyone familiar with the current debate surrounding the concept and evidential status of miracles may be surprised to see how much of the current debate simply reiterates the debate of the eighteenth century.

Despite the inclusion of an appendix intended to serve as a primer for the probability calculus, this is not a book for the beginner. The appendix is much too brief and awkward to serve a genuine primer to the newcomer. There are a few minor typos, and almost all of the more substantial endnotes should have been incorporated into the body of the text. Moreover, Earman's definition of a miracle as a violation of the laws of nature overlooks an ambiguity in the term "violation" – between the suspension of a law of nature and the falsification of a law of nature. Unfortunately, overlooking the former meaning forces him to treat the laws of nature as merely presumptive and this complicates his analysis of Hume's essay. Nevertheless, Earman's book should compel Hume enthusiasts to reconsider their enthusiasm concerning Hume's argument against miracles. Earman sets out a potent case for the claim that Hume's "Of Miracles" essay is largely derivative, marred by ambiguities, and entirely without merit in its probabilistic reasoning.

*God and Time: Essays on the Divine Nature* edited by Gregory E. Ganssle and David M. Woodruff. Oxford University Press, 2002, Pp. 252. \$49.95

J.R. LUCAS, F.B.A., Fellow of Merton College, Oxford.

After the aridities of Logical Positivism there has been an outburst of philosophizing about traditional metaphysical topics. Philosophers, acknowledging the inability of their intellects to comprehend, but knowing, with St Augustine, that to stay silent would be even worse, dare to think about God and time. And in recent years much thought has been given to the relation

between them. In *God and Time* Gregory Ganssle and David Woodruff have gathered together twelve unpublished papers to make available the thought of some of those who have thought most deeply about it.

After an introduction by Gregory Ganssle, Brian Leftow discusses The Eternal Present and Garrett DeWeese whether God's mode of being is Atemporal, Sempiternal or Omnitemporal. The discussion then moves on from God's nature to God, Time and Creation, with chapters by Alan Padgett on Divine Foreknowledge and the Arrow of Time, by Dean Zimmerman on God Inside Time and Before Creation, by Quentin Smith on an Atheist Explanation of Spacetime, and by William Craig on The Elimination of Time in the Special Theory of Relativity. Part Three is devoted to the Nature of Divine Knowledge, and has three chapters by Ed Wierenga on the Alleged Incoherence of Divine Timelessness, by Gregory Ganssle on God's Experience of a Temporal Now, and by William Hasker on the Absence of a Timeless God. The final three chapters discuss God's Relation to the World. Paul Helm raises The Problem of Dialogue; Thomas Senor ponders problems of the Incarnation, Timelessness and Leibniz's Law; and Douglas Blount concludes by considering the Incarnation of a Timeless God.

The contributors disagree. That is only natural in a work such as this. But too often they seem to slide past each other, each using a terminology of his own, which does not easily relate either to the way we normally use words nor to the arguments put forward by others in the volume. But in compensation we are left with authoritative expositions of key positions in the current debate.

Certain key themes recur. The God of the philosophers is by definition perfect—omnipotent, omniscient, impassible, but only questionably personal; the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is indisputably personal, but not superlatively perfect. It is easy to see how Yaweh could know what was going on, remember the past, make plans for the future and on occasion change His mind. But these are by Greek reckoning imperfections, and if the Ground of Our Being is perfect, and free from all these limitations, then we may worship it, but have difficulty in thinking of it as a father who pitieth His own children. Much of the debate, therefore, is whether the God of the philosophers is personal. Can a timeless God be a conscious person, be an effective agent, know what time it is, enter into personal communication with temporal human beings?

Our understanding of time is similarly contested. Boethius assumed that time was just like space. In that case God could be the perfect spectator of all time, as He is of all space, with all time being present to Him as an eternal Now in the same way as all space is together present to Him. Many thinkers, however, have a deep sense that time is not just like space, and is essentially dynamic. An omniscient God must, then, know what time it is, and His knowledge correspondingly change as time goes by, even though He can, as we can, project Himself to other temporal standpoints, and know what time it will be at lunch time on Easter Tuesday 2010. An unforgettable God can also, as we cannot, remember all past events without their fading from His consciousness. Two non-theological points would help clarify the discussion. First, the word "present" can be applied both to instants and to

intervals. If St Augustine had understood this, he would not have been bemused by the ever-shrinking present, and if Boethius had understood this he would have been able to accept that the divine "now" (God's present interval) comprised the whole of time without having to be contrasted with our "now" (man's present instance), which is perpetually changing. Secondly, the parallel between the conjugation of tenses and the conjugation of persons is not complete: although I am necessarily not you, when I converse with you I necessarily do so within the same temporal interval; an omniscient God, knowing all there is to know, cannot affirm, as I can knowledgeably affirm, "I am J.R. Lucas". But it does not follow that an omniscient God, knowing all there is to know, could not knowledgeably affirm that it is now half past three on August 6, 2002. At this point our Judaeo-Christian intimation about God and the dynamic concept of time converge: but that will be a topic for another anthology in twenty years' time. Meanwhile, those who want to think about time and to grapple with the problem of God will find themselves fully stretched as they ponder the different views expounded in *God and Time*.